



THE WHISPERS OF TEMPTATION

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(Genesis 39:6-15)



temptation. It whispers to us, appeals to our pleasure, arouses our interest, and can cause us to fall all too quickly. Temptation is like stepping into the quicksand of sin and sinking fast. When temptation leads to sin, people respond in many ways. Some weep bitterly with regret and shame, but most hide within the crevices of their soul—afraid, alone, hurt, and ashamed—with waves of guilt crashing in around them. These and similar feelings are common when we know we have gone too far, made the wrong choices, and led a reckless life. When we make poor decisions, we self-destruct—yet it was our choosing that got us there.

SATAN'S SUBTLETIES

Temptation seems to creep around when we least expect it. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we are strong and can handle it. Satan knows just when to push our buttons, however. At precisely the wrong time—when our vigilance is weak and our defenses are down—the Enemy presents us with his temptation. He has a way of deceiving us into thinking it is all right, making us see various shades of gray rather than the black and white of right and wrong.

Seeing our weaknesses, Satan will tempt us and offer compelling reasons to compromise. We are tempted toward greed as neighbors and coworkers assert that more is better—and then they live “the good life.” We are tempted to gossip when we are genuinely concerned about someone, yet go too far by uncovering details that hurt and wound. We are tempted into wrong relationships because we fall prey to the myth that somebody is better than nobody. We are tempted to steal a few small items from the office because we feel we deserve it. Temptation to sexual gratification and lust creep into our thoughts as mass media flood our senses with sensuality.

Society says, “Live for the moment, seize the day!” We don’t have to look for sin; it finds us, even chases us. By failing to walk or run from temptation, we lose. We lose strength, self-respect, health, security, and safety. We embrace a life of regret. And that is why we must guard our hearts.

TRYING TO FILL A NEED

Often people try to use things, places, and people to bandage a wound in the soul and meet a need that cannot humanly be met. The need was created by God for only God to fill. Everything else will feel incomplete. Everyone has emotional needs that they try to meet in invalid ways such as friendships, emotional affairs, ministry, church work, and obsessions with appearance, food, and money. They grab onto false ways to meet their needs.

People long to be valued as whole and complete persons, for who they are not just for what they do. Many people search for another person to meet the need; then they get frustrated when the need is still unmet. It is God who satisfies emotionally. God wants to reside in that deep place of our souls.

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STANDING OR FALLING?

We must look at temptation for what it really is. Temptation, when it stands alone, is merely a withering, shrinking lure. Despite its prevalence, it has no power unless we choose to surrender to it. Remember that temptation itself is not a sin—Jesus was tempted—but yielding to temptation is sin.

Everyone can remember falling to temptation. The memory stirs up feelings of being dirty, empty, drained, and even exploited. Grieving the sin is natural and healthy before a righteous God. These feelings and memories can serve as reminders to guard our hearts and minds.

➤ *Confess to God* the brokenness and admit the sin to Him (Ps. 34:18).

➤ *Be willing to be broken.* God delights in a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:17) and will meet you at your lowest point. No friend, mate, or parent can go to the depth of this valley of isolation; only God can talk it with you.

➤ *Make a list.* Write down what you have learned through this difficult life lesson. What have you learned about God? What has been revealed about other people's characters? What have you learned about yourself?

➤ *Create a second column on your list titled "The New Me,"* signifying your transformed life. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). List areas of life that need to be lived differently.

➤ *Make a third column titled, "Action Plans."* Integrating these specific plans into your daily lifestyle will support transformed living. Daily prayer, continual confession to God, accountability to a friend, daily Bible reading, journaling spiritual growth, identifying weak spots, and watching for the dangers of temptation are ex-

amples. At this point, decide what needs to be done to deal with any consequences for the sin. People to whom you must apologize? Restitution to be made? Ask God's guidance in deciding how to handle these needs for action.

➤ *Choose like-minded friends.* Identify other people who will encourage faithfulness and help you to run from temptation (Phil. 2:1-4).

Remember, we are never alone in our temptations. We have a mighty God who has the transforming power to change us, make us godly people, satisfy our deepest needs, be our greatest defense against the enemy, protect us, keep us from temptation, and deliver us from evil. Our victory has already been won through Christ.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of temptation include:

- Genesis 3
- Matthew 4:1-11; 6:13; 26:41
- 1 Corinthians 10:1-13
- 2 Corinthians 7:10, 11; 11:3
- Ephesians 6:10-20
- 1 Thessalonians 5:22
- Titus 2:11, 12
- James 1:12-16; 4:7-10
- 1 Peter 5:8, 9
- 1 John 1:9

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on temptation at Matthew 4:1-11 on page 1233. See also the personality profile of Samson on page 320.

¹⁸Then he became very thirsty; so he cried out to the LORD and said, "You have given this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant; and now shall I die of thirst and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?" ¹⁹So God split the hollow place that is in Lehi,^a and water came out, and he drank; and his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore he called its name En Hakkore,^b which is in Lehi to this day. ²⁰And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

SAMSON AND DELILAH

16 Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there, and went in to her. ²When the Gazites were told, "Samson has come here!" they surrounded the place and lay in wait for him all night at the gate of the city. They were quiet all night, saying, "In the

morning, when it is daylight, we will kill him." ³And Samson lay low till midnight; then he arose at midnight, took hold of the doors of the gate of the city and the two gateposts, pulled them up, bar and all, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron.

⁴Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. ⁵And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, "Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver."

15:19 ^aLiterally Jawbone (compare verse 14)

^bLiterally Spring of the Caller

PERSONALITY PROFILE



SAMSON: YIELDING TO TEMPTATION

(JUDGES 16)

Temptation

Samson, one of history's strongest men, displayed remarkable weakness when it came to temptation. His astonishing physical abilities were unfortunately not matched by his moral qualities. He fooled himself into thinking that his great strength could save him from any predicament. Samson squandered God's gift on thoughtless actions and petty offenses. He was so busy delivering himself from trouble that achieving the temporary deliverance of his people came about almost as an accident.

Samson impulsively married a Philistine woman who was coerced into betraying him. This folly led to a series of confrontations that resulted in temporary relief for Israel from the oppression of the Philistines. Years later, he visited a prostitute in Gaza and almost fell into an ambush. Then he fell for Delilah who then was bribed to betray Samson. He failed to realize the danger behind her efforts to discover the key to his power. He toyed with her temptations. But Samson's physical strength was no match for Delilah's persistence, and he eventually betrayed himself by telling her the secret of his strength.

Samson temporarily lost his strength when his hair was shorn. His captors then destroyed his eyes. Samson was left with little else but a determination to serve God.

In Samson's life we find a gold mine of valuable lessons about temptation. Among the treasures are these:

- > Strength and success in one area will not make us immune to temptation in another.
- > Unbroken patterns lead us downward or upward—temptation returns wherever it has any success.
- > Flirting with temptation makes our defeat almost certain.
- > Temptation and failure may limit our usefulness to God, but it doesn't cut us off from His grace.
- > No matter how bad things get, let the last word be a prayer!

To Learn More: Turn to the article about temptation on pages 62, 63. See also the key passage note at Matthew 4:1-11 on page 1233.

The LORD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation.^a

The voice of rejoicing and salvation
Is in the tents of the righteous;
The right hand of the LORD does
valiantly.
The right hand of the LORD is exalted;
The right hand of the LORD does
valiantly.

I shall not die, but live,
And declare the works of the LORD.
The LORD has chastened me severely,
But He has not given me over to death.

Open to me the gates of righteousness;
I will go through them,
And I will praise the LORD.
This is the gate of the LORD,
Through which the righteous shall enter.

I will praise You,
For You have answered me,
And have become my salvation.

The stone *which* the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone.
This was the LORD's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day the LORD has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Save now, I pray, O LORD;
O LORD, I pray, send now prosperity.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of
the LORD!
We have blessed you from the house of
the LORD.
God is the LORD,
And He has given us light;
Bind the sacrifice with cords to the
horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will praise You;
You are my God, I will exalt You.

29 Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is
good!
For His mercy endures forever.

PSALM 119

MEDITATIONS ON THE EXCELLENCIES OF THE WORD OF GOD

א ALEPH

1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way,
Who walk in the law of the LORD!
Blessed are those who keep His
testimonies,
Who seek Him with the whole heart!
They also do no iniquity;
They walk in His ways.
4 You have commanded us
To keep Your precepts diligently.
Oh, that my ways were directed
To keep Your statutes!
Then I would not be ashamed,
When I look into all Your
commandments.
7 I will praise You with uprightness of
heart,
When I learn Your righteous judgments.
I will keep Your statutes;
Oh, do not forsake me utterly!

ב BETH

How can a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed according to Your word.
With my whole heart I have sought You;
Oh, let me not wander from Your
commandments!
11 Your word I have hidden in my heart,

118:14 ^aCompare Exodus 15:2

SOUL NOTE



Hide and Seek (119:11) So powerful is the Word of God that it can actually keep people from sinning. When believers hide Scripture in their hearts by reading, memorizing, meditating, and applying it to their lives, they are insulating themselves against the pressure of temptation. Often, people give in to the lure of temptation because their hearts and minds are not focused on God and His revelation of Himself. Believers should know in their hearts what the Bible says so that they can stand up to temptation and not sin against God. **Topic: Temptation**

15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles:
16 The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,
And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death
Light has dawned."^a

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

FOUR FISHERMEN CALLED AS DISCIPLES

18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of

men." 20 They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him.

21 Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James *the son of* Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, 22 and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.

JESUS HEALS A GREAT MULTITUDE

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.

24 Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed

4:16 ^aIsaiah 9:1, 2

SOUL NOTE



Fasting and Prayer (4:1-3) Jesus went into the wilderness "to be tempted by the devil." He fasted forty days and forty nights in order to focus on God in prayer as He dealt with Satan. Fasting—going without food for a certain amount of time—helps people dedicate themselves to God and focus more fully on Him.

Those who fast can use their hunger pangs to remind them how dependent they are on food, and hence, so much more on God. Fasting is a spiritual discipline that is meant to build a person's relationship with God. **Topic: Spiritual Disciplines**

KEY PASSAGE



Temptation

THE BEST WEAPON

(4:1-11)

Jesus' experience in the wilderness provides a lesson on how to deal with temptation. *Being* tempted is not a sin, but *giving in* to temptation is.

After fasting and praying in the wilderness for forty days, Jesus was physically weakened and hungry. At that point, Satan came and suggested that Jesus turn stones into bread. Under most circumstances, eating bread would be fine, but for Jesus to have followed Satan's directive by using His power for such a self-serving purpose would have been sinful.

Jesus resisted Satan's temptations with the Word of God. While Satan was twisting Scripture in order to justify sin, Jesus was using Scripture correctly in order to resist Satan and sin. God's Word, correctly interpreted and hidden in our hearts, is our best weapon against Satan's craftiest temptations.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about temptation on pages 62, 63. See also the personality profile of Samson on page 320.

⁶Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. ⁷And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "*The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*"^a ⁸Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; ⁹nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; ¹⁰nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹Now all^a these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

¹²Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

FLEE FROM IDOLATRY

¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? ¹⁷For we, *though* many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

¹⁸Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? ¹⁹What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is any-

thing? ²⁰Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. ²²Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD

²³All things are lawful for me,^a but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me,^b but not all things edify. ²⁴Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's *well-being*.

²⁵Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; ²⁶for "*the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.*"^a

²⁷If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. ²⁸But if anyone says to you,

"This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake;^a for "*the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness.*"^b ²⁹"Conscience," I say, not your

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another *man's* conscience? ³⁰But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for *the food* over which I give thanks?

³¹Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

³²Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the

10:7 ^aExodus 32:6 10:11 ^aNU-Text omits *all*.
10:23 ^aNU-Text omits *for me*. ^bNU-Text omits *for me*. 10:26 ^aPsalms 24:1 10:28 ^aNU-Text omits the rest of this verse. ^bPsalms 24:1



SOUL NOTE

Escape Hatch (10:13) Believers should never be shocked or discouraged by encountering temptation. Satan fights against believers and will mount an assault at every opportunity. God knows that all human beings are tempted, and that different people will be tempted by different things. Being tempted is not a sin; giving in, however, is. God promises that He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear. He also provides "the way of escape." Every time we face temptation, we can know that God will help us through it. We should look for His way of escape and then run for the door! **Topic: Temptation**

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above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. ¹⁸Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.

QUALITIES NEEDED IN TRIALS

¹⁹So then,^a my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

DOERS—NOT HEARERS ONLY

²¹Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

JAMES 1:21

²²But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a

man observing his natural face in a mirror;

1:19 ^aNU-Text reads *Know this or This you know.*

SOUL NOTE



Strength to Resist (1:12-15) Temptation comes from evil desires inside us, not from God. It begins with an evil thought that becomes sin when we act on it. God does not tempt His people, but He will allow Satan to tempt us in order for us to refine our faith and grow in our dependence on God. And He will not allow us to be tempted more than we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13). When temptation raises its head, often unexpectedly, we can resist it by counting the costs and turning to God, asking Him for help, and choosing to obey Him. He will give us the strength we need.

Topic: Temptation

SOUL NOTE



Listen Up (1:19) Communication is more than just talking. If two people are talking at the same time, they aren't communicating—they're just making noise. Communication involves both parties taking turns speaking and listening. Good communication, wrote James, occurs when people are quicker to listen than they are to speak. We want to speak and make our opinions known, but we must also be willing to listen to others. We show respect for others when we listen intently and then speak carefully. **Topic: Communication**

SOUL NOTE



Do It! (1:22) Many people sit in church and listen to the sermon, only to forget what they heard upon exiting the sanctuary. James says, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only." It is important to read, listen to, and know God's Word, but it is also important to obey it. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study and attentiveness to the Sunday sermon by our behavior and attitudes during the entire week. How much is our faith affecting how we live? It should make a huge difference. for "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (2:17). **Topic: Change/Maturity**